DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 422 SO 013 801

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TITLE Aspects of Ethics As They Affect Social Science Curriculums.
PUB DATE Oct 81
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for Geographic Education (Pittsburgh, PA, October, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Objectives; Educational Trends; *Ethical Instruction; Higher Education; *Social Sciences; *Values Education

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the current interest in values and moral education and briefly comments on how they affect college level social science curricula. Many contemporary educators and scholars hope that a renewed emphasis on moral education will achieve the following goals: (1) introduce normative inquiry into higher learning, in order to supplement the typically narrow and value-free methodology of contemporary academic disciplines; (2) revitalize liberal education, especially the humanities, and restore the integrative focus that has been lost; (3) prepare students to effectively and adequately deal with critical human choices, especially, those that have moral consequences; and (4) provide an education that affects both conduct and thought, the founding of character as well as the development of intellect. Today, after several centuries of taking things apart and putting them in separate boxes, a more integrated concern for human space, time, and structure (geography, history, and mathematics), as well as a deep need to reflect upon what we do and what we are (philosophy), are coming to the fore once again. One kind of learning central to the role of an educated person in our society is the concern to feel a personal sense of responsibility for the situation as a whole. The management of population, food, energy, and resources has been revealed as a single issue. A listing of selected books and articles on the teaching of ethics is included in the paper. (Author/RM)

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ASPECTS OF ETHICS AS THEY AFFECT SOCIAL SCIENCE CURRICULUMS

by

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ASPECTS OF ETHICS AS THEY AFFECT SOCIAL SCIENCE CURRICULUMS

Harold Macmillan, former Prime Minister of England once said, "Some of you, when you go down from the University, will go into various professions. Nothing you will learn in the course of your studies will be of the slightest possible use to you-save only this- that if you work hard and intelligently, you should be able to detect when a man is talking rot, and that in my view is the main if not the sole purpose of education."

Douglas Steeples, History Professor at Westminister College (Salt Lake City) stated recently, "A liberal arts education is concerned to provide students breadth of study, depth in a particular field, and career preparation. It assigns primacy to developing independence and power of thought. These qualities challenge the baggage of narrowness, prejudice, ignorance, superficiality, half-formed opinions, untested propositions, moral and mental sloth."[1]

Richard Morrill in Teaching Values in College noted, "The current interest in values and moral education is surely related to the disarray in liberal education. The reintroduction of values holds out the promise of a way to integrate the scattered bits of disciplinary knowledge and offers, moreover, a perspective through which to link knowing and doing. Colleges and universities are themselves subject to a moral critique. Students often fail to receive from their institutions even the minimal respect owed to a faceless consumer. Faculty members and administrators face uncertainly a wide array of moral issues in research on human subjects, relations with outside sponsors, admissions and personnel practices. Professional, personal, and institutional self-interest often appear to be

the prevailing motivations in all of these contexts. Students themselves recently have come to show a striking moral passivity in their attitude toward cheating and campus theft. A minimal morality, or immorality, of privatism and self-protection has eroded the norms and responsibilites of community. It may be helpful to summarize the principal motivations for the current turn toward values, moral education, and ethics. Many contemporary educators and scholars hope that a renewed emphasis on moral education will achieve the following goals: 1. introduce normative inquiry into higher learning, in order to supplement the typically narrow and value-free methodology of contemporary academic disciplines; 2. revitalize liberal education; especially the humanities and restore the integrative focus that has been lost; 3. provide students with an effective and rigorous preparation for dealing adequately with critical human choices, especially, those that have moral consequences; 4. provide an education that affects both conduct and thought, the founding of character as well as the development of intellect."[2]

Educator Mario Fantini has remarked that," Another back-to-basics movement is gaining attention and support in this country, a back-to-basics that supercedes the three R's. In what may be the single most appropriate response to apathy, dissociation, and dehumanization-those destructive by-products of technological progress-the call is going out from professionals of every stripe for a return to the foundation of all learning and to one of the most fundamental elements of daily human living. It is a call for caring. Yet if such a movement is to become a truly humanizing one, the 'basics' must include the affective alongside the academic, and both must be approached with the seriousness and commitment granted any discipline. Furthermore, we must, as family psychologist and social critic Urie Bronfenbrenner has suggested, 'stand

ready to introduce a curriculum of caring' into our classrooms. In a curriculum that endeavors to promote caring values, one must provide learners with choices and options. Actively producing caring values, however, encourages students to be the benefactors of caring attitudes and not merely the beneficiaries. And it gives them, in Bronfenbrenner's words 'experience in how to care'."[3]

RELATIONSHIP OF ETHICS TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

"As people with a deep concern for both physical and human environments, geographers have recovered from their own intellectual hiatus relatively quickly, and we know now that the complex interaction of the human and physical realms are not to be illuminated amply from a single stance and a particular perspective. In coming to this realization, we have been greatly helped by old comrades in arms- the philosophers and mathematicians."

"In brief, the geometry of the universe seems to yield highly consistent functional statements that operate everywhere. In contrast, the multidimensional geometries of the human sciences- geometries representing religious, legal, political and other structures that constrain our daily lives- are not simply unalterable conditions. They may allow or forbid, but they also change as we learn about them, reflect upon them and ask how they might be altered in light of certain moral and ethical values."

"Today, after several centuries of taking things apart and putting them in separate boxes, a more integrated concern for human space, time and structure (geography, history and mathematics), as well as a deep need to reflect upon what we do and what we are (philosophy), are coming to the fore once again."[4]

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SOME CURRICULUM DILEMMAS AND GEOGRAPHY RESPONSES

"Though the humanities have continued to fulfill a moral purpose, the motive of that moral purpose has significantly altered. Literature to the humanist was the repository of a didactic wisdom, to be accepted on the authority of the ancients. Literature to a modern teacher constitutes a scene of moral conflicts intended to assist moral insight on the basis of which the reader is helped to clarify the nature of his own moral conflicts: it serves the purpose of illuminating not didactivism."

"There is one developing feature of modern knowledge, however, which has militated against the width of the curriculum here chronicled- and that can be referred to as its 'explosion'. Knowledge has extended so greatly that its sheer bulk imposes the necessity of specialization in ways that are at odds with general cultivation. It's not simply the social demand for expertice in limited fields; it's the fact that to grapple with any subject with due attention to its full educative possibilities increasingly necessitates concentration rather than diversification. The danger of general education has become superficiality and dilettantism; the danger of specialist education lies in its limitation of viewpoint and the inability to assess what is acquired in depth within a wider intellectual context."[5]

Education involves play i.e., the free play of ideas and concepts. In a world of procrustean curricula: 1) Why should 30 students learn the same thing at the same time? 2) Why should students be assembled in classrooms most of their school lives? 3) With all the talk of innovation, what has happened to individualized instruction, team teaching, multi media presentations, computer programs, etc.? 4) If the world is becoming more finite due to technology, why shouldn't we enhance our knowledge

of the environment? of the Islamic world? the Russian world? the Chinese world? Perhaps geographers already have some answers.[6]

One kind of learning central to the role of an educated person in our society is "the concern to feel a personal sense of responsibility for the situation as a whole. The management of population, food, energy, and resources has been revealed as a single issue. The 'environment' is clearly a global as well as a local problem. Most of what we used to think of as 'domestic' policy is now 'international affairs' too. Private enterprise depends on and intervenes in public policy, and vice versa. The capacity of the human race to retain some control of its own destiny rests on whether literally millions of 'educated' people prove capable of feeling that their individual action must naturally transcend personal and parochial interests and achieve a workable consensus about general outcomes. The art and science of 'getting it all together', the technology of integrative thinking, is what should be 'higher' about 'higher education.'"[7]

FOOTNOTES

[1] Vital Speeches, Volume XLVII, Number 1, October 15, 1980, pp 11-12.

[2] Morrill, Richard L., Teaching Values in College, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1980.

[3] Fantini, Mario, "Disciplined Caring" in Phi Delta Kappan, November, 1980.

[4] Paragraphs from Peter Gould, "So Human A Science" in The Sciences, May, 1981, pp 7-8.

[5] Two paragraphs from Bantock, G.H., Dilemmas of the Curriculum, Wiley, 1980, pp 31-32.

[6] Based in part on: Thompson, B.F., "Education: The Most Dangerous Game" in Humanistic Frontiers in American Education, Fairfield, R. (ed.), Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York, 1971.

[7] Cleveland, Harlan, "What's Higher about Higher Education", Vital Speeches, June, 1981.

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